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THE SOUTHEAST ASIA COLLECTIVE DEFENSE TREATY

STUDIES IN  
COMMUNIST SUBVERSION

II

Soviet methods of guiding  
Individual Communist Party  
Policy and Activity

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TECHNIQUES OF THE  
COMMUNIST SEIZURE OF POWER IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA

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TECHNIQUES OF THE

COMMUNIST SEIZURE OF POWER IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA

INTRODUCTION

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Prior to 19 February 1948, 14 million citizens of Czechoslovakia lived in an independent and prosperous country under a democratic form of government, enjoying a high standard of education, social consciousness, national cohesion and solidarity, and a great measure of individual freedom. Five days later, the Czech Communist Party took full control of the country, swiftly smashed all opposition, destroyed the representative form of government, established forced labor camps, started a collectivization drive, and sealed off the country from the West. This was the essence of the meaning of the change, a change from an independent democratic government to a dictatorship subservient to a foreign power. This swift absorption of a working democracy by the Communist bloc can be understood only if we have before us at least the general outline of events which took place in Czechoslovakia between December 1943 and February 1948, because it was during this time that the Czech CP took all the preparatory steps which led to the successful seizure of power.

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At the beginning of the period (1943), and until conclusion of the war (1945), the Czech CP claimed no more than 27,000 members, most of whom were not even in the country. Just before the coup, the Czech CP had close to 1 1/2 million members and was in control of 2 million trade unionists, the country's security forces, and all important cabinet posts. This rapid growth of CP strength was, of course, planned. The main elements of this plan can be listed as follows:

1. The 27,000 Czech Communists were not alone but could count on the solid backing of the CP of the Soviet Union and the Red Army.
2. The Czech CP had a concrete plan for the acquisition of control over the essential centers of power in the nation: labor unions, police, agriculture, information and propaganda, armed forces, mass organizations, parliament, government.
3. The Czech CP was united and disciplined.

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4. Czech non-communist political parties were disunited; they <sup>all</sup> also did not suspect that the CP slogans pertaining to genuine patriotism, liberty, reforms and democracy were only for propaganda purposes, to be repudiated by the CP after gaining control of the country. They

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did not want to believe that the Czech CP was under full control of Moscow.

5. Social democrats and Socialists allowed themselves to be drawn into a coalition government with the CP, assuring this Bolshevik-Marxist-Socialist bloc effective control of the country. It was obvious that in this coalition a well-disciplined CP, which could count on the support of the Soviet Union, would be the dominating force, capable of maintaining and enlarging its power.

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I. REVIEW OF EVENTS IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA IN THE PERIOD DECEMBER 1943 TO FEBRUARY 1948

This period is divided into two distinct parts: December 1943 to May 1945, and May 1945 to February 1948.

A. December 1943 - May 1945. During this period, the Czech Communist Party established for itself the most favorable position from which it could reach the ~~respective~~ centers of power in the country for the purpose of controlling them or making them ineffectual if they resisted Communist control. These "centers of power" are: (1) the executive branch of the government, (2) the legislature, (3) the armed forces, (4) the security forces, (5) the trade unions, (6) peasant mass organizations, (7) youth organizations, (8) information and propaganda media, (9) illegal armed forces. ~~It~~ is resolutely backed by a strong foreign power. What the Czech CP did to acquire for itself the most advantageous position in relation to these "centers" is as follows:

1. A full year before even partial liberation from the Germans, the Soviet Union clearly showed the Czechs that only the Czech CP had her full backing. She demanded that the Czech non-Communist government in exile begin immediately to negotiate for a "treaty of friendship" with the Soviets, and that this "friendship" be properly implemented by the Czechs. The treaty was concluded in December 1943, and the Benes government in exile began to negotiate in Moscow with the Czech Communist leaders there concerning the future role of the CP in the country's affairs. It was agreed that the CP would be one of the parties in the post-liberation, provisional, coalition-government; that all rightist parties would be outlawed; that the remaining four parties (counting the CP) would be equally represented (thus, the 27,000-strong CP was to represent one quarter of the 14 million Czechoslovak citizens); that the CP would control the Ministries of Interior (police), Agriculture, and Information; that the postwar government would be formed before Czechoslovakia was fully liberated, and that this step would be taken, not in London, but either in Moscow or on the first eastern

liberated territory of Czechoslovakia; and finally, that a definite postwar program would be immediately adopted (the CP had such a program ready and the Benes government had not). Here is a Communist account of the negotiation between Benes and the CP (as reported in the Communist publication, Nova Svoboda, of 19 March 1946):

"When in April (1945) the gentlemen came from London to Moscow and we asked them what sort of program they had, they answered that they had none. When the government was to be formed, we told them: first we shall have to have a program-- and we submitted to them the official postwar program which was accepted with minor stylistic changes. We then took a golden fountain pen, and every one who wanted to become a member of the government had to commit himself by his signature that he would implement the Communist-sponsored program. Only then was the government formed." (Emphasis supplied)

2. Although, after Czechoslovakia was occupied by the Nazis (1938), the Czech communist leaders with only a few exceptions were recalled to Moscow, and did not participate in the anti-Nazi resistance movement sponsored by the Benes government, in 1941 (when Hitler attacked Soviet Russia) they suddenly discovered that they, too, were "patriotic" Czechs and Slovaks. Shortly, they began to claim that they should be the backbone of the anti-Nazi resistance. Until about 1943 their "resistance work" was mostly talk; eventually, however, the CP-controlled resistance became substantial; it was the most active just days before the liberation. Thus, while the non-communists had fought in the resistance since 1938/9, and had suffered terribly by attrition, coming out of the war decimated and leaderless, the Communists exerted themselves only for about one to one and a half years and came out of the war almost intact. Moreover, their ranks were swollen with pseudo-partisans (i.e., those who came out with arms too late to inflict appreciable damage on the Nazis, but soon enough to lend support to the Communists in their claim that CP-supported resistance far outnumbered the non-Communist resistance). These

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persons, having chosen the "right" side, were propagandistically referred to by the Communists as "revolutionary fighters," and were eventually absorbed into the CP. <sup>At the same time they were</sup> promoted to positions within the Government in which the CP was interested (mostly in the security forces). No posthumous credit was given to the non-Communist partisans (Social democrats and Socialists), or to the parties to which they belonged.

3. Directly following the Red Army into Czechoslovakia, the Communists took control over the spontaneously arising "factory militia" whose aim was the protection of property from being <sup>looting</sup> looted either by the retreating Germans or by the local populace. In these mostly patriotic and selfless individuals, the CP saw the embryo of the future "people's army."

4. As the liberation of Czechoslovakia progressed from east to west, selected teams of Communist organizers followed in the wake of the Red Army in order to help with the election of "national committees" as local organs of state power. The fact that these teams enjoyed the protection of the Red Army and that they acted not as partisan spokesmen for the Communists but <sup>as</sup> pretended to be representatives of the provisional government, lent them enormous prestige. Certainly, not many local citizens were prepared to quarrel with them. With the help and guidance of these teams, the "national committees" chosen at this time were heavily weighted in favor of the CP. As a result, many more Communists and Communist sympathizers were represented on the "national committees" than the 25% to which the CP was "legally entitled" (even under the debasing agreement signed by the non-Communists in April 1945; cf. para "a", above).

5. The Czech trade unions which were not unified centrally before the war, were so unified by the Germans. The CP <sup>insisted</sup> after the war that the trade unions remain unified. It was easier for the CP, which brought able union leaders from the Soviet Union (and in the absence of the old Social Democratic leaders who were exterminated by the Germans), to take over the unions from the top.

6. There is no evidence that the Communists laid any special groundwork aimed at easier acquisition of control over the remaining four recognized potential power centers prior to the entry of Soviet troops into Czechoslovakia in 1944. These four centers are: the peasant mass organizations, the youth



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organizations, the armed forces, and illegal armed bands. This, of course, does not mean that there were no prior plans made for their penetration once the Communist leadership returned to Czechoslovakia from the USSR on the heels of the Red Army.

2 B. May 1945 to February 1948. Starting with the above-listed advantages in May 1945, the CP began slowly but systematically to consolidate its might in the recognized power centers. The Communist guiding principle in this work appears to be as follows: it is not the high level of CP-controlled power which will be decisive, but the favorable balance of CP-controlled power over that controlled by the non-Communists. Consequently, the CP rendered those positions of power, which it could not control, as ineffective as it could. The positions destined to be made ineffective were: the youth organizations, the peasants unions, the armed forces and, after 1946, the parliament.

1. The Parliament. The Parliament contained the representatives of the four legal political parties (the Communists, the Social Democrats, the People's Party (for Bohemia), or the Democratic Party (for Slovakia), and the National Socialists) which constituted the so-called "National Front." In its conception, as well as in its manner of functioning, the National Front was a potent instrument of political control serving the CP. The Front was a symbol of national unity and solidarity which had existed in the heat of struggle against the German invader. Although a "minority stockholder" in the Front, the CP managed to establish virtual control over it. The manner in which this was done illustrates a basic CP technique utilized in transforming a minority into an effective majority. The central idea behind the National Front -- cooperation of all component parties in an effort to attain common national goals -- was utilized by the CP in the following fashion: First, the CP approached the Social Democrats with the proposition that, because both groups were "Marxist," and stood for similar economic policies, they should establish the Communist-Social Democratic alliance. In this alliance, the Communists constituted a majority. Next, *Second,* the Communist Party -- speaking in the name of the Communist-dominated Social Democratic-Communist alliance -- approached the non-Marxist National Socialists, proposing the formation of the so-called "Socialist Bloc of Workers of Town and Country." In

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this Bloc, the majority of votes belonged to the "Communist-Social Democratic" alliance. <sup>^</sup> The approach to the National Socialists was on the "common" ground of Socialism, and the common experience in the Nazi concentration camps and in the resistance. (For some reason, nobody questioned the validity of the Communist claim to experiences in the concentration camps, or inquired for the causes of their belated joining of the Czech national resistance). This appeal was particularly effective with most of the National Socialist leaders (The older National Socialist leaders felt constrained to promote their wartime heroes of the concentration camps and resistance leaders to high positions within their own party not only as their just reward and in order to bring fresh blood into the leadership, but also, as if in apology for having spent their wartime years directing resistance from the safety of London. The CP leaders who "fought" in Moscow did not seem to be bothered by such squeamishness). With these alliances made, the CP was able to push any legislation it wanted. Unofficially, it cleared legislation through the "Communist-Social Democratic" alliance, then through the "Socialist Bloc of Workers of Town and Country," and, finally, officially, in the National Front Parliament. It took the non-Communist parties about two years ~~until they caught on to this "legal usage of parliamentary procedures"~~ by the CP. However, by that time (late 1946), the CP managed to push through the Parliament all the legislation necessary to socialize the country. Now their usage of the Parliament changed; to the Communists it became the forum from which they were able to prevent the passage of any legislation which was not in the CP program. ~~For~~ Although the disenchanted Social Democrats and the National Socialists no longer supported the CP as parties, many of their more leftist members continued to do so, giving the CP sufficient votes to block proposed non-CP legislation. Also, controlling the nation's police, the CP was in a position to make life very miserable for the more outspoken and able anti-communistic National Socialists. With the help of the police, the CP managed to invent and compile an unending series of charges of "collaboration" and "treason" against the more troublesome National Socialists. Now these, in turn, had to devote so much of their time and energy to disproving the charges against them that they found little time for work in the Parliament. For these charges, although completely false, were not easily disproved in the eyes of

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the public (they were never brought before courts). They were plausible, or contained elements -- unrelated to the essence of the accusation -- which the accused did not want to air publicly. This tactic also served another purpose useful to the CP: it prevented the non-Communist parties from presenting a solid anti-Communist front. Whoever raised a voice advocating the unity of the non-Communist parties was immediately silenced by the CP with accusations, not only of "collaboration" and "treason," but with such additional accusations as "reactionarism," "violating the principle of the National Front," "imperialism," and "espionage for the Western imperialist and warmongering powers." -- Thus, the "United Front" technique was used by the CP, first as a constructive instrument helping to build up Communist strength, and then (1946-48) as a weapon to destroy the non-Communist opposition.

2. Ministry of the Interior (Police) Immediately upon assumption of office in 1945, the Communist Minister of Interior "reorganized" the police forces. The old police and the gendarmerie were composed almost exclusively of politically centrist and rightist elements. To "reform" them would have taken too long, so they were "reorganized." The "reorganization" consisted of creating a new, unified "National Security Corps," as a substitute for the old police and the gendarmerie. A great many old policemen and gendarmes were mysteriously "lost" in the process of transfer to the new organization. The depleted ranks of the Corps were quickly filled with either Communists or the so-called "revolutionary fighters" referred to in paragraph II-1-(b), above. In higher positions, however, the Minister was forced to retain some of the more capable and politically-supported non-Communists and even anti-Communists, namely, those with powerful political backing of the non-Communist parties of the National Front. He was forced to get rid of these "the hard way," i.e., one by one -- often on "well-documented," false charges. But, as late as February 1948, there were still about 70 of these "undesirable" high police officials in office. They, however, turned out to be, at that date, not a burden but an asset (cf. Section III, below). -- At this stage the Communist-controlled "National Security Force" (police) began to be used by the Communist Party as an instrument to acquire assets in other

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centers of power which the Party set out to control, or, failing control, to make ineffective. The Communist Minister of Interior was entrusted by the coalition government with the task of "purification" of the nation of wartime traitors and German collaborators. It was his job to initiate investigations and bring cases to court. The courts were under the Ministry of Justice and not under Communist control. Still, the Communist-controlled police of the Ministry of Interior managed to administer their own brand of "justice" to the wartime traitors and collaborators. Investigated cases of accused traitors who did not wish now to collaborate with the Communist Party were brought before the courts and justly punished; those of the guilty ones, on the other hand, who threw themselves at the mercy of the Communist police, and agreed to collaborate fully with the Communist Party, avoided sentencing and loss of their jobs. because the police failed to "find conclusive proof" of their guilt.

3. Ministry of Agriculture. A ~~CP~~ hold on the Ministry of Agriculture served the CP cause nearly as effectively as its control of the Ministry of the Interior. The Ministry's role in the distribution of farm machinery, price fixing, grain purchase and its influence on the Peasant Bank (to which the vast majority of peasants had to turn for loans), greatly enhanced the CP electoral appeal. Also, although the land reform and the expropriation of land which belonged to the 3 million expelled Germans and Hungarians, was initiated by a decree of (National Socialist) President Benes, the CP-dominated Ministry of Agriculture took sole charge of implementing these decrees. The CP was clever enough to take full credit for the speedy distribution of land, but, at the same time, it was farsighted enough not to issue permanent titles to the property for a long time. In this manner, the CP made doubly sure of the allegiance of the new farmers. Their support enabled the CP to score heavily in a large number of rural districts in the first postwar election in 1946.

4. Ministry of Information. The contribution of this Ministry to the CP cause was "only" of an auxiliary nature (an excellent instrument for publicity for the CP and for suppression of news unfavorable to the CP; cf. Section III below) until the crucial

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period of the 1948 coup. At that time, CP control of the nerve centers of all media of communication inside and outside the country proved to be of incalculable importance: <sup>81</sup> Anti-Communist forces of the nation were neither alerted nor capable of concerted action; with one stroke they became but disconnected remnants of an outgoing regime.

5. The Trade Unions. Although three quarters of the trade unions belonged to the Social Democrats, their central control organ was the creature of the German invaders. It was easy for the CP (through their police) to get rid of all the German appointees on charges of collaboration. To fill these high posts, the CP had a great number of party members brought from the Soviet Union where they had undergone training for just such positions. Also, the most influential labor union leader who survived the German concentration camp happened to be a CP member. At the same time, all important Social Democratic labor leaders perished in the German concentration camps, and the Social Democrats did not have the foresight to train a new cadre. Thus, by default, the CP inherited top posts in the central organ of the trade unions. Although many individual unions continued to be led by the Social Democrats, they began to orient themselves more and more toward the Communists: first, because the Social Democratic leaders had either very little or no experience; and secondly, because the Social Democratic party had no special trade union program, while the CP had a program which the Social Democrats could find no way to improve. In this state of affairs, both the Social Democratic trade union members and trade union officials found themselves in the role of Communist followers. By February 1948, the whole Czech trade union movement was responsive only to the CP leadership.

6. The Factory Militia and the Armed Forces. The Factory Militia was a wartime creature and was viewed by the CP as a good base on which to build the future "people's army" in replacement of the regular army which was composed mostly of conservatives and fervent nationalists. When recurrent efforts by the CP to legalize the Factory Militia (and gradually to shift to it the balance of military power) failed, the CP put the Militia quietly "to sleep" but allowed it to retain all arms in its possession for possible use only in a "revolutionary situation" (such as occurred in February 1948).

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At the same time, the CP realistically decided that the regular armed forces could not be gained for Communism. Accordingly, the CP made every effort to make the armed forces ineffective. It accomplished this by the following means: (1) having the Soviet Union insist that the Minister of National Defense and the Chief of Staff be "acceptable" to the Soviet Union (eventually it turned out that both individuals named to the posts were secret Communists); (2) placing men loyal to the CP in all sensitive positions in the armed forces (with the help of the two secret Communists); and (3) voting in the Parliament against military budgets, so that by 1948 the Czech armed forces were equipped only with World War II "relics" (which lacked replacement parts) and with only a minimum of ammunition. In this manner, the Czech armed forces ceased to be an effective center of anti-Communist power.

7. Peasant Unions and Youth Organizations. These two potential centers of power, like the Czech armed forces, were both conservative and extremely nationalistic. They were also decentralized. The CP decided that it would cost too much energy even to attempt to make them into significant centers of CP power. It decided, therefore, to leave these two organizations in their impotent condition, and to see to it that the non-Communist parties would not re-vitalize them. However, the non-Communist parties, who thought only in terms of legal power, failed not only to make youth and peasant organizations into effective power centers for themselves, but did not even realize that power was located in them.

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~~SECRET~~II. CREATION OF POLITICAL CRISIS

By the fall of 1947, the Czech CP had all the necessary power to take full possession of the country. All it needed now was a "crisis" which would create a "revolutionary situation." Its first attempt at creation of such a crisis failed. That attempt was based on a CP-instigated "bomb plot" against three of the most venerated non-Communist cabinet ministers (Vice-Premier, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of Justice). It was supposedly organized by "reactionary elements." This "plot" was designed to give the CP-controlled police an excuse to intervene and make a thorough "housecleaning" in these three centers of power (ministerial posts) <sup>fail to</sup> controlled by non-Communists. The "housecleaning" could not help but cause the desired crisis to develop, the CP thought. However, as the "bomb plot" was dramatically announced by the CP, the National Socialists immediately went to work and uncovered the fact that the two members of the "plot" were Communists: one a Communist cabinetmaker and the second one a CP parliamentary deputy. The evidence against the CP was so convincing that the CP was forced to suspend the offending CP deputy. The Party now utilized the power vested in the CP-controlled Ministry of Information to hush up the whole affair. Surprisingly, this affair neither effectively alerted the non-Communists to the Communist danger, nor moved them to utilize it against the CP politically. 8:

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 The second attempt to create a crisis, several months later, was a ~~Brilliant~~ CP success. It was caused in this fashion. In order to provoke the democratic parties to the extreme, the Communist Minister of the Interior summarily fired all non-Communist police functionaries (about 70 of them). The strongest reaction which this defiant act produced in the democratic ranks was the resignation of 12 of their cabinet members. Instead of staying in and fighting, they retired from the arena in righteous but ill-expressed anger. The stage was now set. Moscow dispatched Deputy Foreign Minister, Zorin, to direct the play. The date was: 20 February 1948. 8--

~~SECRET~~III. THE COMMUNIST COUP

Upon <sup>the</sup> resignation of the 12 democratic cabinet members, all CP-held positions of authority and power became revolutionary operations bases. The posts abandoned by the democratic ministers were immediately occupied by Communist "shock troops." The army was confined to barracks; the airforce was grounded; the peasants and the youth continued to "sleep on." Communist power was brought to public view. Rifle-equipped police and Factory Militia filled the streets; in an hour-long, CP-instigated token-strike, the trade unionists lined themselves up with the CP, and then joined the pro-Communist demonstrators in the streets. All media of communication and propaganda, controlled by the CP, gave only the Communist version of the crisis; non-Communists were accused of breaking the National Front cooperation agreement. Because of this "crime," the CP insisted that it would never again permit the resigned ministers to return to their posts. The chief aim of the CP was to force President Benes to accept the resignations and turn over all state power to the CP. In order to prevent the crisis from being settled through parliamentary procedures, the CP arbitrarily postponed the regularly-scheduled meeting of the National Assembly. In order to help the President to make up his mind quickly, the CP now established a second, extra-governmental, seat of power in the form of a "Central Action Committee" of the National Front -- which now consisted of none but the Communists and the Communist-oriented leftist Social Democrats and National Socialists, who broke away from their parent parties. The CP thus implemented its earlier plan to "rejuvenate" the National Front by including in it the CP-controlled (or heavily penetrated) mass organizations as replacements for the non-cooperative democratic parties. Revolutionary "Action Committees" were created throughout the country as self-declared guardians of national security during this hour of crisis. When all mass organizations and leftist members of the non-Communist parties had associated themselves with the "Central Action Committee of the National Front," the democratic cause in Czechoslovakia was lost. Now, even if the non-Communists found some way to unite and regain the balance of power in the government, the "Central Action Committee" was ready and able to challenge the power of the legal government and to provoke civil war if the CP so desired. Also constituting a threat were some units of the Red Army in Austria, which the Soviet Union suddenly indicated she wished to move to Eastern Germany "over the shortest route possible," i.e., through Czechoslovakia.



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On 25 February '48 President Benes capitulated. Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister Zorin returned to Moscow.

--8-- The process of Bolshevization of Czechoslovakia had begun. The leftist elements of two non-Communist parties were allowed to exist as two "independent" parties, temporarily given the control of six ~~very un-~~ <sup>8--</sup> ~~important~~ -- ministries. Social Democrats, who <sup>had</sup> so foolishly assisted the CP in gaining complete power, were given the usual treatment: a purge, and incorporation into the CP. Prolonged and systematic purges of, and attacks on, democratic elements in all organs of the nation (government, army, police, mass organizations, educational system and, shortly, the church) were initiated. For the first time, the real intent of the Communists was fully and publicly announced and demonstrated. The CP no longer "loved" the Socialists, the Democrats, the Liberals and the Progressives. It did not ask for their cooperation; ~~the CP demanded~~ <sup>it</sup> it by "law" and force. The trade unions ceased to be the workers' bargaining bodies, and became the government supervisors of the workers and of their work. Strikes were prohibited. Labor camps were set up and filled with not only rightists but also with the leftist non- and luke-warm Communist collaborators. Western borders of the nation were tightly sealed. Czechoslovakia became a full-grown "People's Republic" under the "dictatorship of the proletariat," which Stalin (quoting Lenin) defines in the following words:

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"Dictatorship of the proletariat is the rule - unrestricted by law and based on force..."

Events in Czechoslovakia subsequent to the coup were in accordance with that definition.

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#### IV. CONCLUSION

Events in Czechoslovakia clearly illustrate certain fundamental truths about the aims and tactics of Communist parties throughout the world. These truths may be summarized as follows:

1) The Communists' primary aim in opposing any system, organization, or group, is not the destruction of power inherent in them, but the seizure of such power and its utilization in establishing a dictatorship -- a "dictatorship of the proletariat" -- actually, dictatorship of the Communist Party.

2) Communist readiness and even eagerness to cooperate with any "democratic," "liberal" or "progressive" forces in a country where the CP is not yet in power is only a temporary expedient, a means to acquire more power, a tactic. Once the CP assumes power in a country, it systematically and ruthlessly destroys these collaborating "democratic elements."

3) Before the CP gains control of a country, it "stands" for all the good and popularly appealing things: land for the peasants, freedom to strike, freedom of speech, etc. On gaining power, the CP collectivizes the land, outlaws strikes and penalizes the expression of truly free opinions.

4) The real, basic aims of the CP of any country are outlined in the books which it requires its members to study: e.g., the writings of Lenin, Stalin and Mao Tse-Tung. Deviation from Party teaching in any CP in the world is regarded as a crime -- punished by penalties ranging from rebuke and humiliation, to imprisonment and death.